

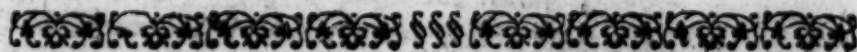
A  
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

*Stamford in Lincolnshire,*

ON THE

F A S T D A Y.



[Price Six Pence.]

WILLIAMSON'S

S E R M O N  
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

Stamford in Lincolnshire

ON THE

F A S T D A Y

THE

[Price Six Pence]

W. D. W.

Printed and Sold by W. D. W.

5  
*Awful Providences, Calls to Repentance.*

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A  
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT  
S T A M F O R D,

In the County of LINCOLN,  
On the 6th of FEBRUARY, 1756,

Being the Publick Fast Day appointed by Authority.

---

By J. WILLIAMS. *k*

---

The Mighty GOD displays his ruling Hand,  
The Frame of Nature shakes at his Command.  
Ye Sons of Men be warn'd, attend the Call;  
Nor longer sooth your Pride, when mighty Kingdoms fall.

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Published by REQUEST.

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REACHED AT

CLAS OF MAT

In the County of Lincoln

the City of FEBRUARY 1886

being the French Fall Day appointed by Authority.

BY T. WILKINS.

Mighty GOD displays his ruling hand  
Frame of Nature shaken in Commotion

...of them be wanted, and the Cell  
...your Bill, when many a man's bill

Political REQUEST

100-100000



NUMBERS XVI. 34.

—*Lest the Earth swallow us up also.*

“ **W**E cannot be guilty of a greater  
“ Act of Uncharitableness, says a  
“ justly admired Writer, than to  
“ interpret the Afflictions which befall our  
“ Neighbours, as Punishments and Judg-  
“ ments.—It aggravates the Evil to him  
“ that suffers, when he looks upon himself  
“ as the Mark of divine Vengeance, and a-  
“ bates the Compassion of those towards him,  
“ who regard him in so dreadful a Light.—  
“ This Humour of turning every Misfortune  
“ into a Judgment, says he, proceeds from  
“ wrong Notions of Religion, which, in its  
“ own Nature, produces Good-will towards  
“ Men, and puts the mildest Construction  
“ upon every Accident that befalls them.”  
Further on, the same Author says, “ We are  
“ all subject to the same Accidents; and when  
“ we see any one of the Species under any  
“ particular Oppression, we should look upon  
“ it as arising from the common Lot of hu-  
“ man Nature, rather than from the Guilt  
“ of the Person who suffers.” \*——But, so  
apt are Mankind to entertain a good Opinion  
of themselves, that, notwithstanding the

\* *Spectator*, No. 483.

Uncharitableness and Unreasonableness of such a Conclusion; they frequently ascribe their own Preservation, to their superior Virtue; and the Calamities of others, to greater Wickedness.—This has been the Disposition of Mankind in former Days, as we learn, particularly from *Luke* xiii. 1. and the following Verses. Some among those who attended upon our Saviour, took Notice to him of the unhappy Fate of the *Galileans*, whose Blood *Pilate* had mingled with their Sacrifices: He, well knowing the Conclusion they inferred, replied, *Think ye that these Galileans were Sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such Things? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*—In order to set his Hearers right in this Matter, our Lord himself introduces the Case of those who had been slain by the falling of the Tower of *Siloam*: This Instance, in some respects, seemed more to the Purpose than the other, as there was no human Interposition attending the Death of these; and therefore it appeared to Men more providential than that of the *Galileans*, who were destroyed by *Pilate*. In this Case also, our Saviour said, *I tell you, nay; except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*—From hence we learn, not to apply a Censure of greater Guilt, to those who may remarkably suffer, or even come to a miserable End; not to be Self-righteous, and condemn others; but rather impress upon our own Minds, a  
lively

lively Sense of the divine Goodness in our Preservation, when others are destroyed;—and attend to the Caution here given, that *except we repent, we shall all likewise perish*.—It is certain that there have been, and still may be, Instances of divine exemplary Punishments; but with the utmost Caution ought we to express ourselves, upon such awful Subjects. It by no Means becomes us, to determine the inscrutable Designs and Dispensations of Heaven: All we can safely affirm about such Things, and indeed rest assured of, is, that every Dispensation of Providence, whether respecting others or ourselves, is directed by infinite Wisdom and Goodness; and is, in the best Manner, calculated to promote the greatest Sum of Happiness.

The Death of *Korah, Dathan, Abiram*, and their Adherents, is an Instance of a remarkable Judgment befalling heinous Offenders; and there are several Reasons why *they* should be thus fearfully visited. The Nature of their Crime rendered a divine Interposition, in some Measure, necessary. They, in Effect, did presume to call the Almighty himself to account for his Actions, by murmuring against *Moses* and *Aaron*: For this Affair happening but about two Years after the Children of *Israel* came out of *Egypt*, these very Men must have been Eye Witnesses to many wonderful Works, which were wrought by the Hand of *Moses*; e. g. the Plagues inflicted



upon the *Egyptians*; the dividing of the Sea for their Passage; and especially, the Delivery of the Law upon Mount *Sinai*; which Things must have shewn them, what Authority *Moses* was vested with, from whom derived, and the Improbability of his having assumed to himself, the Office of a chief Ruler, or put his Brother *Aaron* into that of a Priest, without a divine Command; and consequently their Murmurs were not so much against Men, as against the Appointments of God.—It was no small Aggravation of their Guilt, that they were of the Tribe of *Levi*; which Tribe the Lord had chosen for the Service of the Tabernacle, to officiate before the Congregation for ever.—*Moses* takes Notice of this in the eighth and following Verses, and concludes with saying,—*For which Cause thou and all thy Company, are gathered together against the LORD; and what is Aaron that ye murmur against him?*—When Men thus dared to affront the divine Being, to reject his indisputable Appointments; it was highly, if not absolutely necessary, He should in some remarkable Manner, shew his Anger and Displeasure: If He had not, all his Commands and Ordipances would naturally be exposed to be disregarded and trampled upon.—Besides, the Happiness of the whole People depended upon the Issue of this Affair, in some Degree: These Men, and their Party, were of very considerable Weight in the Congregation, and

*Men*

*Men of Renown* (Verse 2.) It is therefore highly probable, that if the *Lord* had not interposed to decide the Matter, they would have influenced the greater Part, if not all the People to rebel, (for they were very apt to do it) and thereby deprive themselves of the promised Land, nay, expose themselves to the Danger of being utterly destroyed in the Wilderness. For, as *Moses* was appointed to his Office by divine Authority, we cannot suppose that the Lord would have fulfilled his Promise, and brought them to the Possession of *Canaan*, under the Guidance of Men who had openly rebelled against him, and rejected his Authority.—And further, it was necessary that upon the erecting of God's temporal Kingdom among the *Jews*, some remarkable Judgments should be inflicted upon Offenders, to prevent any Occasion for the like, in Time to come: Such Severity would teach Survivors, the Necessity of Submission to divine Appointments; and of Obedience to divine Commands \*.—Thus *Nadab* and *Abihu* perished for offering strange Fire before the Lord †. And thus upon the erecting of Christ's Kingdom, *Ananias* and *Sapphira* were struck dead for attempting to deceive the Holy Ghost ‡.—We cannot help admiring the prudent and upright Manner, in which *Moses* behaved upon this Oc-

\* See *Benson's Hist. Christ.* Vol. I. p. 105. 2d. Edit.

† *Levit.* x.

‡ *Acts* v.

caſion.

caſion. He did not aſſume to himſelf, the power of determining the Affair in Diſpute, but referred it to the Lord. He did not attempt to ſecure to himſelf, and his Brother, their reſpective Stations, by any low, crafty, or fraudulent Method ; but freely deſired the People to judge of his Pretenſions, by the Iſſue of this Affair.—In the 29th Verſe, he ſays, *If theſe Men die the common Death of all Men, or if they be viſited after the Viſitation of all Men ; then the Lord hath not ſent me. But if the Lord make a new Thing, and the Earth open her Mouth, and ſwallow them up, with all that appertain to them, and they go down quick unto the Pit ; then ye ſhall underſtand, that theſe Men have provoked the Lord.* The Judgment immediately overtook them ; the Earth clave aſunder, and they, and all that belonged to them, were ſwallowed up. When they who were near their Tents ſaw this, they fled, ſaying, *leſt the Earth ſwallow us up alſo.*—That this was not the Effect of natural Cauſes, is evident from the Conſequences of it, in deſtroying only thoſe who were guilty. Had it been the Effect of a natural Earthquake, it is highly probable, if not certain, that the Innocent would likewiſe have periſhed.—Beſides, *Mofes* foretold this Event, and even pointed out the Men who would be affected by it, and calls it a *new Thing*, becauſe it was what never had been known before. Such a Deſcription before  
hand



hand given, proves a divine Interposition, in some Measure, upon the Occasion, as well as the Inspiration of the Person foretelling; for it is impossible for any Man, unless he is inspired, to foretel Events, especially Earthquakes. The Causes we may, possibly, know; but are incapable of discovering the Time when those Causes will produce their fatal Effects.—That great Philosopher, the incomparable *Newton*, from several Experiments he made with combustibile Substances, assigns as the Cause of Earthquakes, “The great Quantity of Sulphur with which the Earth abounds, and the Warmth of its interior Parts, discoverable by hot Springs and burning Mountains.—From whence we learn, (says he) that Sulphureous Steams abound in the Bowels of the Earth, and ferment with Minerals, and sometimes take Fire with a sudden Explosion; and if pent up in Subterraneous Caverns, burst these Caverns with a great Shaking of the Earth, as in springing of a Mine.”\* Those Countries which most abound with Sulphur, are mostly incommoded by Earthquakes. Where there are Mines of this, Exhalations ascend, which meeting with Subterraneous Caverns, stick to their Sides, where they mix with the Nitre which comes out of the Earth, and make a kind of Crust which

\* *Newton's Opticks*, Book iii. Qu. 31. Water, Winds, &c. are also frequently the Causes of Earthquakes.

will

will easily take Fire: This it frequently doth, being a Kind of natural Gunpowder, which, at the Appulse of Fire, goes off with a sudden Blast or violent Explosion, rumbling in the Bowels of the Earth, and lifting up the Ground above it, so as, sometimes, to make miserable Havock and Devastation, till it gets a Vent.—Burning Mountains, such as *Vesuvius* in *Italy*, and *Ætna* in *Sicily*, are like so many Funnels or Chimnies, by which these Subterraneous Fires are discharged.—When they have a Communication with these, they readily get out, from Time to Time, without shaking the Earth; but where this Communication is wanting, so that the Fire cannot come at these Vents; it either removes all Obstacles in its Way to them, or forces the Ground to open, and discharges itself by a new Vent. They are sometimes felt at considerable Distances, and shake a Tract of Ground, with more or less Violence in different Places, according as they are near to, or remote from the Fire; and are always accompanied with a dull Noise, like that of a heavy Carriage rolling with great Rapidity\*.  
 —Earthquakes are often felt without any Eruption appearing, as it happened a few Years ago, in many Parts of this Kingdom, especially in *London*; but, sometimes are attended with dreadful Effects. In the Year 1693, fifty four Cities and Towns, with a

\* See *Chambers's Dictionary*.

very large Number of Villages, were either destroyed, or greatly damaged by an Earthquake in *Sicily*.—In the Year 1746, the City of *Lima*, with the Port of *Callao*, in *South America*, were almost destroyed by an Earthquake. Tho' the late Shock at *Lisbon* was not, perhaps, so fatal as the two former were; yet it seemed to be more general, and the Accounts already received, are very affecting and dreadful. On the first of *November*, between nine and ten in the Morning, was felt the first Shock; when some were in Bed, and others engaged in their different Business. When none apprehended so tremendous a Visitation, suddenly the Ground under them was violently agitated, and by its convulsive Motion seemed to declare, that the Dissolution of all Things was near.—This was succeeded by others, which destroy'd that large and populous City, and in which several Thousands of Lives were lost.—Who is able to describe the Consternation and Horror of those unhappy People, on that distressful Day?—Within their Houses they durst not stay; and if they betook themselves to the Streets, they were exposed to be buried under the Ruins of the surrounding Buildings. As the Streets were narrow, and the Houses on each Side were tumbling down, many who run out of their Houses for Safety, were crushed to Death.—In the most spacious Parts of the City, they could not think them-

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selves



selves secure ; for, so violent was the Tremor  
 of the Earth, that it threatened every Mo-  
 ment to open, and swallow them up.—  
 Endeavour to form in your Minds an Idea of  
 their affecting Situation.—The solid Ground  
 under them violently convulsed, overthrowing  
 the strongest Edifices ; the ruined Houses  
 all in Flames ; the Air darkened with Clouds  
 of Dust and Smoke ; their Ears filled with  
 the horrid confused Sound of the Earth's  
 groaning, the Houses falling, the Flames  
 crackling, but especially, with the piercing  
 Cries and Shrieks of Men, Women, and  
 Children, crushed or burned to death. Every  
 one anxious for their own Safety, incapable of  
 relieving others, however desirous of it ; their  
 nearest Relations, their Husbands, Wives,  
 and Children perishing before their Eyes ; and  
 themselves, tho' so fortunate as to escape  
 Death in one Place, every Moment expecting  
 to meet it in another. In a Word, which  
 way soever they turned themselves, Ruin and  
 Destruction threatened them. This is but a  
 very faint Description of their Calamity ;  
 yet, this is sufficient to give us some Idea of  
 their Distress. Oh ! who is able to conceive,  
 much more to express, the Emotions they  
 felt, both on Account of the Distresses and mi-  
 serable Deaths of their dearest Friends, and of  
 their own Danger !—But I must desist.—I only  
 add, that this Shock, and the succeeding ones  
 which

which were felt at *Lisbon*, were also felt in *Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, England, Scotland, Ireland*, several Parts of *America*, and especially in *Africa*, where it overthrew two or three Cities in the Empire of *Morocco*, and probably in many other Places, which as yet we have no Accounts of. So universal a Shock, I think, was never heard of! What Gratitude, what Praise, do *We* owe our Almighty Deliverer, who has preserved us from the dreadful Consequences of it, which others have so severely felt!

How weakly, nay foolishly do they talk, who, in ascribing these Effects, *wholly*, to natural Causes, thereby, in a Manner, deny a superior Agency? Earthquakes are occasioned by natural Causes.—What then? Does not Nature herself, and all her Operations, depend upon the Creator? And tho' such Things may not flow from any immediate Interposition of the supreme Being;—yet, as He is the Former of all Things, are they not under his Direction?—Did the Creator, in giving Laws to Nature, exclude his own Agency?—So far from it, that the whole Frame thereof is upheld by him; and all those Appearances, which we call the Effects of natural Causes, flow from the divine Energy, in preserving the original Laws of his Creation.—There is nothing that happens in the whole Universe, but what He either commands, or permits: He can, if he thinks

proper, prevent the Effects of natural Causes from taking Place ; or permit them in such a Manner, as to be attended with no fatal Consequences.

Thus we hear of many who are destroyed by Earthquakes and Hurricanes in other Countries, (which, by the way, is an Argument for the Truth of Christianity \*.) Why are *We* preserved? Whence do *We* derive our Security? From our Situation? That by no Means excludes *Great Britain* from the like Calamity with *Lisbon*, as Experience abundantly testifies.—The Shock which destroyed *Them*, was felt by *Us*; but in such a gentle Manner, as if intended only to warn us from our evil Courses, *lest we likewise perish*.—This Kingdom hath in former Days suffered by Earthquakes, as History informs us.—It is reported, that even so late as the last Spring, a Mountain in the neighbouring County of York, was split into many hundred Pieces; some of which were thrown to the Distance of four or five hundred Yards.—The Ground about it continued to shake, and the Rocks to cleave, for several Days, attended with a loud Noise like rolling Thunder. • If this Account is really true, it must have been the Effect of some eruptive Vapor, which got a Vent there. *What terrible Havock would it have made, had the Discharge been in, or near, any of our large and populous Towns!*—

\* Luke xxi. 11. Math. xxiv. 7.

But,



But, whether this Account is to be credited or not, we have sufficient Testimonies from History to convince us, that we are not, by our Situation, exempted from the most dreadful Consequences of Earthquakes.—There are Vulcanos or burning Mountains, in *Ice-land*, North of us, as well as in *Italy*, *Sicily*, and other Places, South of us; whence we may justly conclude, that sulphureous Steams, and fiery Damps, pervade the whole Globe; and that all Countries, are, more or less, exposed to their calamitous Effects. *When the Judgments of God are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World should learn Righteousness\**; when he ariseth to shake terribly the Earth†; when he looketh upon it, and it trembleth; when he toucheth the Hills, and they smoke‡; shall Men not fear his Power; and will they not dread his Displeasure?—Oh! Britons, attend to the Warnings given you; amend, lest the Earth swallow us up also.—The fatal Consequences which attended the late Earthquake at *Lisbon*, as well as the critical Situation of our publick Affairs, in regard to Peace or War, have induced the Government to appoint this Day, as a Publick Fast; a Day of Humiliation and Prayer; that the Inhabitants of *Great Britain* and *Ireland* might prostrate themselves, as it were, together before God, to deprecate his Judgments, which

\* *Isaiab* xxvi. 9.    † *ii.* 19.    ‡ *Psal.* civ. 32.

our national Wickedness loudly calls for; to implore his Protection and Blessing upon our Fleets and Armies; and to intreat him to crown with Success every Measure which may be made use of, to secure unto us, our Properties, and our Liberties, both religious and civil.—Before I descend to particular Instances of our national Wickedness; permit me, briefly, to lay before you the Nature of a Religious Fast. This, in some Measure, may be necessary, in order to prevent your falling into Superstition, on the one Hand, or into Neglect, on the other.—As the keeping of Religious Fasts was in Practice among the *Jews*, before our Saviour's Time; He nowhere enjoins it as a new Duty on his Disciples. He only speaks of it as already in use, and as what would obtain among his Followers. In *Math. vi. 16.* and the following Verses, he speaks to the Manner of it; namely, that it ought to be secret; not attended with extraordinary Marks of Mortification and Holiness.—What our Saviour here says, can only refer to private Fasts; for as to Publick, such as this Day is appointed, they cannot be hid from Men; and, was it possible, it would not be proper; because that at such a Time as this, outward Tokens of inward Humiliation, may tend to promote a devout Frame of Mind in others.

Tho' Fasting is no where in the New Testament particularly enjoined; yet, what our Saviour

Saviour says in relation to it, is sufficient to convince us, that at some Times, and upon some Occasions, it is the Duty of a Christian; unless we suppose that he countenanced a Matter of meer Indifference, and gave Directions about what is neither expedient nor necessary. This, I believe, none will be ready to assert. Several Occurrences in private Life, may render a Fast proper for single Persons, Families, or particular Societies of Men; and for the same Reasons, Publick Fasts may be proper also, in Times of Publick Calamities, of every Kind.—A Fast, strictly speaking, means a total Abstinence from Food; but that, indeed, is one of the least important Parts of a Religious Fast, and not absolutely essential to it. Abstinence from Meat and Drink, hath, in itself, nothing virtuous; nothing that is valuable in the Sight of God, who regards principally the Disposition of the Mind: It is, as it were, only accidental to such a Day as this; but as it may answer some moral good Purposes, it may properly attend it.—The Frame of Mind best suited for religious Exercises, is the calm and serene, yet lively and active; when the Mind is not ruffled by Passion, nor discomposed by any uneasy Sensations or Reflections. Whatever, therefore, tends to make the Body uneasy, seeing that will necessarily affect the Mind, should be avoided at such Times as these. Food of every Kind hath some Tendency to disorder



disorder the animal Frame ; it gives a Spring to the Solids, and adds Velocity to the Blood ; it clouds the Understanding, in some Constitutions, and make Men dull and unactive, heavy and drowsy. As these Sensations will damp the Fervency of the Mind, it is highly proper, that Men abstain from the Causes of them.

Abstinence from Food, on Days of Humiliation and Prayer, may also be expedient, as it may, in some Measure, impress upon our Minds, a Sense of our Unworthiness of even the common Mercies of Life ; and this certainly forwards inward Contrition, and promotes a real Humiliation of Soul. This Duty, as to the Degree of Abstinence, is not equally binding upon all ; because Constitutions are very different. Some Men can bear a total Abstinence, others cannot ; some, for several Hours ; others, for very few.—In this Case, no Man is required to injure his Health, or subject himself to *very* uneasy Sensations of Hunger or Thirst.—This is an Extreme which should be avoided, because this, as well as Plenitude, will damp the Ardor and Fervency of the Mind.—Every Man must judge for himself, how much his Constitution will bear ; and not superstitiously attempt to do, more than he is able, conveniently to do.—The divine Being is not pleased with the Uneasiness of his Creatures, or delighted with their Misery.  
He

He requires only a proper Humiliation of Soul. Men themselves must know, what Degree of Abstinence, whether total or partial, is best suited to their Constitutions, and most likely to be productive of such an inward acceptable Frame of Mind. As to bodily Pleasures, Recreations and Diversions; these will be apt to lead Men's Attentions from what they should be engaged in at such a Time, and therefore are absolutely improper.

—In a Word, we fast acceptably in the Sight of God, when we truly humble ourselves before him, under the liveliest Sense of our past Guilt, and the Demerits of it impressed upon our Minds; and firmly resolve, thro' the Grace of God, never willingly to offend in the like Manner for the future. That Abstinence from Food, whether altogether, or in Part, which best promotes such a Disposition, is what we should observe: This will recommend us to the Favour and Protection of God; and will render him propitious to our Prayers. This is the Language, both of Reason and Revelation, about this Matter; and by this, we should examine, and *determine*, whether we perform this Duty, properly or improperly.

But, to return from this Digression; which I was led to, by attending to the Mistakes which Men are apt to form, about every outward Circumstance of Religion: I would now point out to you, some Instances of our national

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onal Wickedness, which are notorious, and loudly call for a speedy Reformation.—The wise Man says, *that Righteousness exalteth a Nation; but that Sin is a Reproach to any People* \*.—When we attend to the general and prevailing Wickedness of the present Age; the Scepticism and Infidelity which are become so fashionable; the dissolute Lives of the Professors of the Gospel; in a word, the Profaneness, Intemperance, and Sensuality, of the high and low among us; when we attend to these, I say, may we not affirm justly, that Sin is our Reproach †.—Charity would make us hope that the World is not *quite* so bad, as some Men chuse to represent it; tho' the Immorality of Men's Lives proves, that it is very bad.—To magnify the Wickedness of Mankind, certainly, can be attended with no good Consequences; rather the reverse: For, upon this Supposition, to what Cause can the great Prevalence of Vice be attributed, but to a strong, and even irresistible, natural Prone-ness to Evil; and Aversion to all that is good: As they, who hold the great Superiority of Vice over Virtue in the World, have, in Effect, confessed: And, when Men are once brought to entertain such an Opinion of themselves; that they are so *exceedingly* prone to all that is evil, and averse to all that is good; *That* will be deemed by them a sufficient Excuse

\* Prov. xiv. 34.

† See Fortin's 3d Dissertation.



for, even, the grossest Immoralities. Perhaps, such Doctrines have promoted the Wickedness of Mankind; however, they evidently seem, and are generally thought, to have such a Tendency.—But, tho' Charity would make us hope, that Mankind are not so bad as represented by some Writers; yet, from daily Observation we learn, that they are very far from being so good as they ought to be.—The Fraud and Injustice, the Violence and Oppression, the Intemperance, Luxury and Debauchery; the Neglect, nay, Contempt of God and Religion, which so universally prevail, are sad Proofs of the Degeneracy of the Age.—Deserving of our Attention at this Time, are the Prophet *Hosea's* Words, when describing the Degeneracy of the *Israelites*.—*Hear the Word of the Lord, ye Children of Israel; for the Lord hath a Controversy with the Inhabitants of the Land, because there is no Truth, nor Mercy, nor Knowledge of God in the Land: By Swearing and Lying, and Killing and Stealing, and committing Adultery, they break out, and Blood toucheth Blood; therefore shall the Land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish* \*. How well this Charge, as to the general Design of it, may be brought against the Inhabitants of this Kingdom, I leave others to judge: Certain I am, that in each of the Instances here mentioned, we are shamefully

\* *Hosea* iv. 1, 2, 3.

guilty, and therefore have great Reason to dread the Consequences.—Undeniable Proofs of the Severity, with which the Punishment here threatened, was inflicted upon them, remain to this Day. For the once fruitful Land of *Canaan*, is now the worst, the most barren and desolate, of all the inhabited Countries of *Asia* \*.—Should not this make *Us* apprehensive also, of a Punishment proportionable to our Crimes, if we repent not?

The supreme Being is immutable in his Nature; as jealous of his Honour as ever he was; all Wickedness being *still* the Object of his Abhorrence; and though he hitherto forbears, yet, he assuredly will avenge himself on *Us*, if we persist in our Provocations.—If God hath turned *a fruitful Land into Barrenness, for the Wickedness of them that dwelt therein* †; may we not fear that *our* national Impieties will expose *our* Country to the like? But to be more particular.—There are three Instances of prevailing Wickedness, which, at such a Time as this, especially, call for a speedy Cure. The first is, profane Cursing and Swearing; taking God's Holy Name in vain.—This abominable Practice is so common, that we can hardly cross a Street, but we hear it; we can hardly be in a mixed Company, but the Conversation is interlarded with Oaths.—Our Ears are daily saluted with

\* *Voltaire's Hist. of the Crusades.* † *Psalms* cvii. 34.

horrid

horrid Imprecations ! Upon every, the most trifling, Occasion, the tremendous Name of the Almighty is invoked ; —Nay, Men frequently utter horrid Blasphemy, in a *seemingly jocose* Manner ; wantonly call for Damnation on one another, yea, on themselves.—To speak irreverently of the Deity, much more to Blaspheme his sacred Name, is a Practice so shocking, that it would be an Affront to Reason, says the late Mr. *Addison* \*, to endeavour to set forth the Horror and Profaneness of it.—The very Mention of it, says he, exposes it sufficiently to those in whom the Light of Nature, not to say Religion, is not utterly extinguished.” It is a Sin the more inexcusable, because, in Nature, there is no Temptation to it ; but, it arises wholly from evil Custom and Habit.—It is an amazing Thing that they who denominate themselves Christians, can be guilty in this Kind : That they dare call for Damnation on themselves, or others, when the Gospel, which they profess, is so full and clear in explaining the tremendous Nature of that Term !——You, who are addicted to this abominable Practice ; consider how provoking in the Sight of God such a Profanation of his Holy Name must be ! And how justly, when you imprecate yourselves or others, he may cause the Earth to open, and swallow you up also !——The Go-

\* *Spectator*, No. 531.



vernment has taken Cognizance of this horrid Impiety, and has laid a Penalty on those who are guilty of it: But thro' the Remissness of those who are impowered to inflict the Penalty, it is to very little, or no Purpose. It were to be wished that some more effectual Method might be found, to put an End to it entirely; if that cannot be done, surely, a Way might be found to lessen it. The proper Execution of the Laws already in Being, would considerably diminish it.—If Magistrates would *encourage* (and not *discourage*, as, it is to be feared, they frequently have) proper Measures; we might soon hope to see a Reformation in this Instance.—I earnestly wish they would hereafter bestir themselves in the Extirpation of so impious a Practice, so dishonourable to God, and so unworthy of Man. Their own Safety, as well as the Publick, demands it; for such Vices, if not cured, will doubtless bring upon us some heavy Mark of the divine Displeasure;—*perhaps the Earth may swallow us up also!*—But further, the Profanation of the LORD's Day, and the Neglect of his Worship, are of the reigning Vices of the present Age.—The supreme Being hath reserved for religious Exercises particularly, only one seventh Part of our Time; but it is notorious, that Men not only forget God, and neglect his Worship, all the Week, but profane even the Sabbath; by devoting it to Employments unworthy of it, not to say destructive

destructive of the Design of its original Institution.—Secular Business, Pleasure and Diversion, are what Men commonly spend the Sabbath in.—To such a Height is this Impiety now grown, that Men not only neglect Attendance upon the Worship of God; but seem to study the most effectual Ways to dishonour the Lord's Day, by spending it in the grossest Acts of Sensuality and Impurity.—If under the Law a Man was, by the divine Command, stoned to Death, for gathering of Sticks on the Sabbath \*; what ought they to fear who usually prostitute it to the most sensual Gratifications; to Employments diametrically opposite to the Design of a religious Sabbath?—This, I am afraid, is a growing Evil, and if a Remedy is not applied to put a Stop to it soon, it may at last banish Religion and Virtue out of the Land.—I am fully persuaded that most, if not all the reigning Vices of the present Age, are, in some Measure, owing to a general Neglect of religious Worship.—Ministers of the Gospel should be particularly careful, lest their Negligence should help to promote the Spread of this Evil. And if the Authority with which the civil Magistrate is already invested is not sufficient, may it not be proper to increase it? Surely, something ought to be done to prevent the Nation's falling into universal Irreligion and Licentiousness (which, indeed, is too much the Case already) and

\* Numbers xv. 35.

thereby

thereby expose it to the righteous Judgment of an incensed God.

I add another Instance of a national Vice, which is Intemperance.—Our modern Refinements in Luxury are often attended with such Scenes of Barbarity, as really are shocking to human Nature; hardly sufferable in a civilized Nation, especially, among those who profess the merciful and compassionate Spirit of the Gospel.—But to pass over these to the common Vice of Drunkenness: A Vice, in itself, so odious, that it is amazing how reasonable Creatures can be addicted to it.—

“ A drunken Man (says an admired Writer)  
 “ is a greater Monster than any that is to be  
 “ found among all the Creatures that God  
 “ has made; there is no Character which  
 “ appears more despicable and deformed, in  
 “ the Eyes of all reasonable Persons, than  
 “ that of a Drunkard.”\* This Vice is the greatest Reproach to the human Nature. For, is it not the Reproach of a Man to be delighted with a Gratification, which sinks him down to a level with the Brute: To take Pleasure in those very Things, which render useless to him, for some Time at least, if not for ever weaken and impair, those Powers wherein alone the Excellency of his Nature consists?—This is a Vice which is hurtful to Men every Way; weakening the Understanding, de-

\* *Spectator* No. 569.

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stroying Health, and wasting their Time and Substance. — Self-Enjoyment, one might imagine, would prevent Men's being guilty of Excesses; but we see not only this Motive insufficient, but others also of infinitely superior Weight: We see those who call themselves *Christians*, and profess their Belief in the Gospel, which forbids it under the Penalty of forfeiting everlasting Glory, frequently guilty of it! *Christians*, shall these be called? No: They forfeit all Right to that honourable Name; for the Gospel, is given to assist Reason; but these Men seem to strive to eradicate the very first Principles of Reason, and therefore should by no Means be called *Christians*.

—But I must draw to a Conclusion. — Upon a Review of these Enormities, which you yourselves know prevail among all Ranks and Degrees of Men in the Kingdom; doth it not appear, even, astonishing that the Earth has not *swallowed us up also*! — How long shall the most glaring Impieties be thus tolerated among us? — How long shall the Lives of *Christians*, be a scandal to that honourable Name? — How long shall we tire the divine Patience with our aggravated Wickedness? — The present Time, and the Circumstances of our Publick Affairs, seem, particularly, to point out the Necessity of an immediate national Reformation. — We seem to be at the Eve of a War, which we are forced to enter into, by the Encroachments of an ambitious

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and perfidious, neighbouring Nation, whom no Laws, Divine or Human, nor Treaties ever so solemn, can bind : And as the most abundant Preparations cannot secure unto us Success and Victory ; which are of G O D ; should we not endeavour to recommend our Country, and Ourselves, to his Protection, by turning away, every One from his Iniquity ?——This is an infallible Method to render abortive, all the Designs of our Enemies against us.—That tremendous Calamity which lately hath befallen the Kingdom of *Portugal*, especially the Capital of it, the populous City of *Lisbon* ; should rouse us from our Lethargy, to provide for our safety by Repentance and Amendment, *lest we likewise perish !* As we had great Connexions, in the Way of Trade, with that Kingdom, our Merchants have suffered greatly by that Calamity ; and many of our Countrymen who dwelt upon the Spot, are by it reduced, from Affluence, to Want and Indigence.—*Doth not this Circumstance seem to have a peculiar Claim to our Attention ?*——The Wealth of Individuals is, by this awful Providence, greatly diminished ; and as all Societies consist of Individuals, the Publick Wealth must, in some Degree, be affected.—May we not therefore look upon the Part We bear in their Distress, as an Earnest of some future greater Calamity, if We take no Warning ?—We are now affected in our Substance ; let us reform, lest a greater  
Evil

Evil befall Us !—May high and low among us become truly penitent for our past Iniquities, and hereafter, thro' the Grace of God, strive to adorn the Profession We make of the Gospel of the Holy Jesus: Thus shall We recommend our Country, Ourselves, and all our Concerns, Publick and Private, to the Divine Favour and Protection; and derive thence either a Deliverance from, or support under all the Distresses of this Life.—To conclude, let us no longer provoke the Deity with our aggravated Impieties, lest he be weary with *Forbearing*, and cause *the Earth to swallow us up also*.

**F I N I S.**



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 weary with Repentance, and cease the

W. M. L. A.

